

June 2013

**EAST
MELBOURNE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER**

Contributions and Suggestions

We invite contributions relating to the history of East Melbourne from our members. Articles of up to 1500 words will be considered for publication. Small articles and items of interest are also welcome.

We would be pleased to receive your suggestions and ideas for activities, guest speakers, excursions or anything else you might like us to organize on your behalf.

Please contact any member of our committee.

Aims

A full Statement of Purposes appears in our Documents of Incorporation but briefly the aims of the Society are as follows:

- To foster an interest in the history of East Melbourne.
- To build an archive of material relevant to the history of East Melbourne.
- To promote interchange of information through lectures and tours.
- To promote heritage preservation.

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Membership

Membership of the East Melbourne Historical Society is open to all who are interested in the history of East Melbourne.

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Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

**Affiliated with
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria**

President's Letter

Now is the winter of our discontent, as Richard 111 so rightly said. The weather has become bleak and grey, we have had cold winds and rain that reminded us that there will be no more warm weather until September. The garden looks miserable with bare tress and scruffy rose-bushes and the fat pigeons in my courtyard have turned into importunate beggars, hanging round the back door for a handful of muesli in the mornings.

This is not to say that we didn't complain in autumn too. There were balmy golden days and long mild evenings, but we were still not entirely happy: not enough rain, too much dust and, oh please, do they really have to start the football season so early, because there's no parking to be had in any of the streets? And why has the City of Melbourne taken away almost all of the two hour parking locally, so that visiting friends feel permanently nervous, particularly when the little yellow signs went up telling them their time started from the moment they occupied a car parking space? No time to comb your hair or check your tie is straight!

There have been good things, too. Gipps St, long the preferred route for drivers avoiding Hoddle St. on their way to the city, now echoes Hotham St, with a new median strip with a line of baby trees down the centre, forcing drivers to maintain a slower pace. Holy Trinity Church has begun a fund-raising effort to support a

permanent minister and their vital work with the homeless and young people. Mosspennock, long neglected by the owners, Thakral, will have a useful life again as apartments attached to the Hilton, while a building permit has gone through for Valetta, the old home of Sir Redmond Barry and of Lowe Kong Meng, the industrious Chinese merchant who leased it for a time. On 19 June, Paul McGregor will give members a lecture on the achievements of this famous Victorian.

We had a full house for Major-General Michael O'Brien's lecture on the men and women of East Melbourne who volunteered to serve in World War 1. Mike has done a huge amount of research and presented us with a list of around 740 people. As a result, the EMHS Committee decided that we would mount an exhibition at the library next year in April, the centenary of the Gallipoli landing, using Mike's research as our starting point. We called for volunteers to assist in accessing service records and other on-line information. Peter Fielding and Janet Scarfe have already begun working on the list and we have a number of other volunteers who will be taught how to access both the digitised service records and to utilise our own database. Thank you to all those who are supporting our efforts; without your help, it would not be possible.

Jill Fenwick, June 2013

J.A.B. Koch in East Melbourne

I am always fascinated at the way that my interests intertwine and expand as I make connections. Last year I joined the "Friends of Labassa" and then discovered that there are buildings in East Melbourne by the architect of the nationally significant National Trust mansion Labassa (1889-1890, Caulfield North) and the listed private residence Friesia (1887, Hawthorn). His more notable works are characterised by very European and Classical influences including Hellenistic motifs.

His notable buildings in East Melbourne are the Parsonage/Manse (1890) of the Lutheran Church at 22a Parliament Place, East Melbourne almost adjacent to the National Trust (Vic.) headquarters, and a rather grand residence (1891) for John. C. Stanford, auctioneer, Minerva at 68 Vale St, East Melbourne overlooking Yarra Park (and, sadly, the car park). In the digitised newspapers in Trove (National Library of Australia) I discovered that John C. Stanford was associated with the property and livestock auctioneers Powers, Rutherford & Co for 62 years and by 1913 he was written up as completing his 48th Annual Sale of stud sheep. He sold the house around 1910.

By 1915 the house had become Tandarra Private Hospital and after its sale in 1927, for £6,000, it was the Tandarra Infant Welfare Training School, part of Berry Street Infants' Home and Hospital. During World

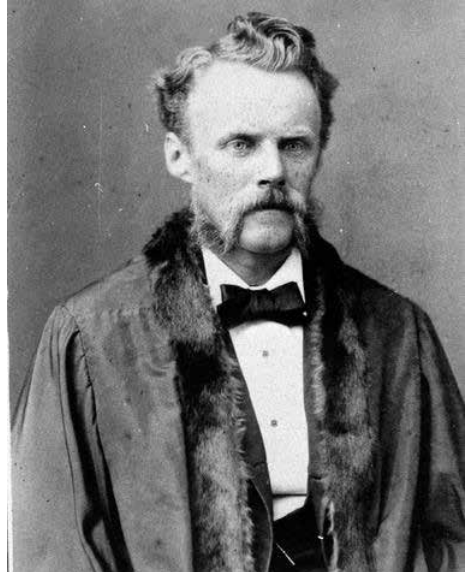
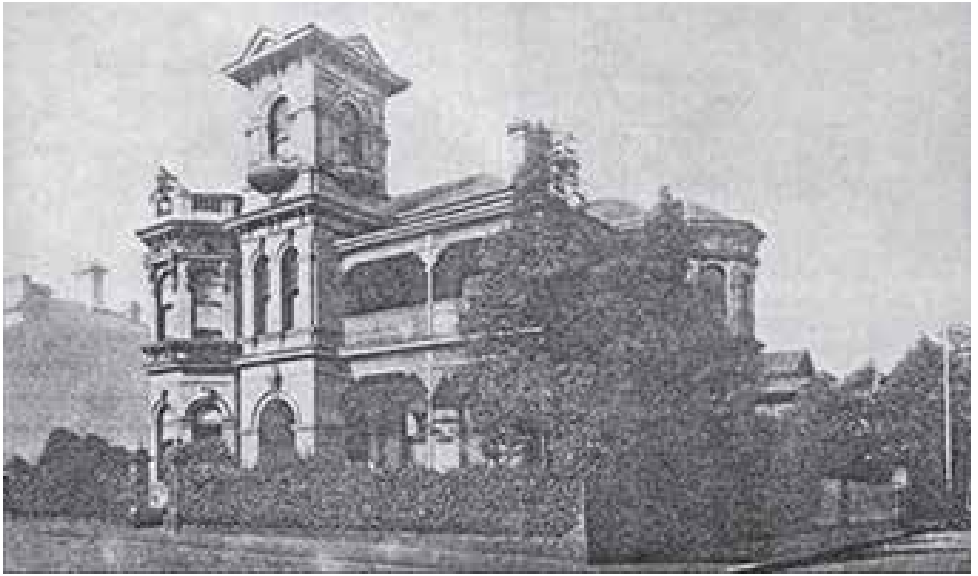


Photo of J.A.B. Koch. Caption - J.A.B. Koch, c.1882.
Courtesy: Yarra Libraries.

War 2 the babies and staff were evacuated and the property was leased to the YWCA, which provided accommodation for service women. In 1949 Berry Street returned to the property, redecorating it as a Toddlers' Wing. In 1979 it was again leased as an Ambulance Officers' Training Centre. It was sold in 1990 and is has now been converted to four apartments.

The architect John A. B. Koch was born in Hamburg in August 1845 and migrated to Australia with his family in 1855. He was educated and trained as an architect in Melbourne and in 1873 he was appointed as Architect to the City of Melbourne. In 1887 he was appointed Architect for the City



Tandarra, c.1927. From Looking Back Looking Forward. Courtesy: Berry Street.

of Richmond. Most of his work was in Hawthorn and Richmond.

He took an active interest in professional and community affairs and was a member of the congregation at the East Melbourne Lutheran Church. He was active in the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects and he served as a

Councillor in the City of Richmond for eight years, serving as Mayor in 1877.

Koch ceased practice in 1913 and died in 1928.

Andrew Dixon, Friends of Labassa
<http://www.nationaltrust.org.au/vic/labassa> Labassa is open the third Sunday of the month from 10.30 am - 4.30 pm and refreshments are available.



Tandarra c.1975. Courtesy Berry Street.

Antique Table comes home to Jolimont

When Brian and Rosie Smith moved to Jolimont Terrace six years ago, they brought with them a burred walnut table which had belonged to Brian's parents.

As a child Brian had been told that his father, a General Practitioner and businessman in the City, had bought the table shortly after the purchase of the family home in Hawthorn in the 1950s. He was aware that it had been bought in East Melbourne and that there was a letter somewhere detailing the table's provenance.

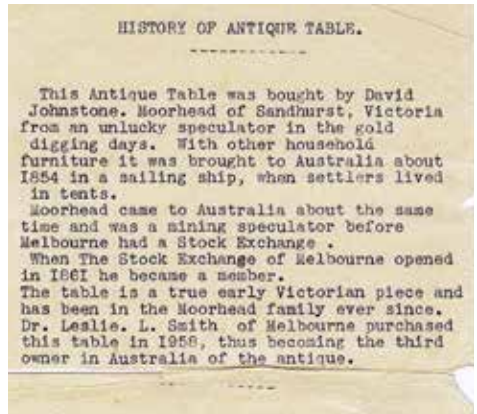
The letter dated 1958 was found and we discovered the table had been bought from a lady called May Maxwell who lived in Jolimont.

We marvelled at the coincidence and wondered occasionally where May had lived. We were thrilled at how well it fitted into the Victorian ambience of our apartment.

Time passed and Rosie became a member of EMHS. When she was reading the EMHS publication, The Lanes of East Melbourne it became apparent that our antique table had well and truly come home, all bar 300 metres.

Maxwell Lane which runs off Agnes Street behind the Olive Café is named after May Maxwell, as many EMJ residents may well know. For those of you not familiar with the story, this is what we discovered in The Lanes of East Melbourne.

May Maxwell lived at 157 Wellington Parade, Jolimont, for sixty years. She died there, aged 100, in 1977. In her early

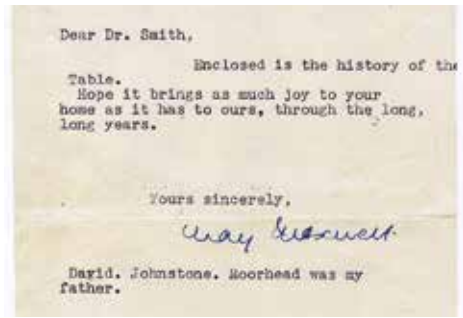


days, she had been an actress, but it is as a journalist that she is best remembered. She was born in Bendigo in 1876, the eldest child of David Moorhead, an Irish-born stockbroker. Christened Mary, she was known as Maisie to her family. She left Bendigo in 1895, aged nineteen, to embark on a career on stage. To earn money, she worked as a governess and a lady's companion. As Maisie Maxwell, she had some success as an actress, appearing at the Theatre Royal in Melbourne and the Lyceum in Sydney. In 1907, while touring in Perth, she began writing for that city's Sunday Times and came to the realization that journalism

would give more security than her acting career. Back in Melbourne, she changed her name to May Maxwell and took a job with Table Talk.

In 1910, she was poached by The Herald and asked to edit its weekly page for women. Ten years later, her page was published daily, the first time a women's page had appeared in a newspaper on a daily basis. In 1911, four months after its foundation, she joined the Australian Journalists' Association as its second only female member. She served on the A.J.A.'s Victorian committee from 1925-1927 and was made an honorary life member in 1960. In the 1969 Queen's Birthday Honours, she was awarded the British Empire Medal for her services to journalism.

May Maxwell retired from The Herald in 1934, at the age of 58, but continued as a freelance writer and broadcaster on radio stations 3XY, 3UZ



and 3KZ. She wrote her last article on the eve of her 100th birthday; it was published in The Herald the next day.

We will never know the connection between Brian's father and May Maxwell and why he purchased the table from her when she was 82. We like to think she would be pleased that the table has come back to Jolimont, so close to its old home – and yes, it does bring its fourth owners joy.

Rosemarie Smith

Valetta

What value is heritage? Who protects the past for future generations? What can be done if the owners engage in a kind of destruction by stealth? Valetta is one of East Melbourne's most striking buildings. Its unusual design was created by architect, Osgood Pritchard, the same architect who designed Clarendon Terrace. The resulting building with its two sets of French doors leading on to an enclosed central balcony was elegant, graceful and unique in East Melbourne and perhaps all of Melbourne.

Today, Valetta stands empty, as it has for some years. With a planning permit to make alterations, the owners

embarked on removing the old fire escape stairs and part of the back wall, but without a building permit to do so. So rough was the work, that bricks began to fall out from the north wall and, with complaints from neighbours, the City of Melbourne stopped the work and banned it from proceeding without a proper permit. But this was all they did.

In the meantime, there are broken windows on the ground floor and the French doors leading to the balcony. Windows on every side are left open. There is a gaping hole in the back wall and an open pit behind it (presumably for the lift which was going to be installed). Although the City of

Melbourne planning representative said the site was protected by a security fence, this consists of nothing more than some netting on stakes and has already been breached. It is an open invitation to squatters.

Valetta is an A listed building, sited next to Clarendon Terrace and across from St. Hilda's, three of the most striking buildings in the A listed Clarendon Street streetscape. It was also the home of two of early Melbourne's most celebrated men. Redmond Barry and Lowe Kong Meng. Our next talk coming up on 19 June will focus on the Chinese community in Melbourne and particularly on Lowe Kong Meng, who rented Valetta from 1868 to 1876.

Soon after Kong Meng moved in the house was advertised for sale and we learn that downstairs held a dining room, a breakfast room, a sitting room and a nursery, all of generous proportions. Upstairs was a drawing

room, opening to a 'nice conservatory, floored with Chinese tiles' and four bedrooms, two with dressing rooms. Ceilings were 14 feet high on both levels. The hall was 'very spacious, and laid with a tessellated pavement floor, with a very handsome staircase leading to the first floor'.

In 1875 The Argus advertised that a young kangaroo had been lost from the property. One can only hope that the kangaroo had enjoyed the ambience of the conservatory while in residence. Did Kong Meng take it for hops in the Fitzroy Gardens?

Over the years the house has been occupied by a number of institutions. The ladies' college run by M. and Mme. Vieuzeux was there 1862-1865 and again briefly in 1883. More recently it has been the headquarters of the Country Fire Authority, The Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Red Cross. Now it awaits salvation.

Coming Events

**Wednesday, 19 June at 8.00 p.m. –
Lowe Kong Meng**

Historian Paul Mcgregor, whose special interest is the Chinese in Australia, will give a talk on Lowe Kong Meng, Chinese businessman and leader of the Chinese community in early Melbourne. Lowe Kong Meng lived at Valetta, 206 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne from 1868 to 1876.

**Wednesday, 21 August at 8.00 p.m.
– Janet, Lady Clarke and Women's
Philanthropy in Australia**

Dr. Barbara Lemon made the history of Australian women's philanthropy the subject of her 2008 doctoral thesis. She pored over a multitude of records left behind by philanthropists now gone and interviewed many of those still with us, and is now a recognized expert in her field.

At Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne